

ST. PAUL

New Alsace

The famous missionary Father Joseph Ferneding founded St. Paul at New Alsace in 1833 as the mother church for the German-speaking parishes in Dearborn and surrounding counties. Within four years, the congregation had 150 families and a new brick church. More than 100 parishioners were confirmed on July 8, 1838, the day that Bishop Simon Gabriel Bruté blessed the new structure.

In 1863 Confederate General John Hunt Morgan led 2,500 cavalymen (Morgan's Raiders) through New Alsace on his raid of southern Indiana. Eventually parishioners made a home of the inn where Morgan napped while guards watched.

Father Lawrence Weinzapfel, a devout and beloved pastor, had the church redecorated and a new brick parish hall built. His successor, Father Sylvester Bloemke, organized a men's basketball team, promoted the parish picnic and cared for the grounds and cemetery almost single-handedly. When the number of Sisters of St. Francis from Oldenburg grew to more than the convent could accommodate, Father Bloemke had them move into the rectory, and he moved into the former old brick school.

St. Paul existed as a public school for 120 years but was threatened with being closed in 1973. The school was kept



open by the persistence, prayer and pledges of parishioners and the support of the pastor. Seventh- and eighth-grade students transferred to the public school, but a school board was elected to take charge of the first six grades. Gradually lay men and women joined the priest in conducting religious education classes. Counseling sessions and adult programs have been added.

ST. MARTIN

Yorkville

German Catholics arrived in and around the village of Yorkville in 1831.

In 1833 Father Joseph Ferneding celebrated the first Mass there in the home of John Heimburger. Before that, Catholics traveled to either New Alsace or Dover for Mass. Often a procession formed on Sundays at the Heimburger house and people prayed the rosary while walking or riding

in an ox-drawn wagon behind Joseph Schnetzer, who usually led the three-mile trek to New Alsace. In May 1850, Schnetzer called a meeting of families to discuss founding a parish.

Schnetzer, Heimburger, Joseph Weizel, Nicholas Brueckler, and Sebastian Blettner met with Bishop Maurice de St. Palais at New Alsace on April 21, 1850, to discuss the new parish. By May 1850, written permission had been received from the bishop, and the church was finished on land donated by Heimburger by 1852. The church was a mission until 1886 when Father Aloysius Dannenhoffer became resident pastor. He was described as "honest and sincere and pious, but not blessed with overmuch diplomacy."

Father Henry Seibert built a school in 1872, with one room upstairs for grades 1 to 4 and another room downstairs for grades 5 to 8. It served as a public school until 1967. The school was torn down in 1979 to make room for a multipurpose building. The Sisters of St. Francis from Oldenburg taught at St. Martin School from 1859 to 1967.

The greatest builder for the parish was Father Francis H. Sondermann, who was pastor from 1914 to 1947. Construction began on the present church in 1914; it was completed in 1917 and was paid for by 1922. Father Sondermann also managed to renovate the cemetery and the grounds.

